New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1948

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1948 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1947 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
*Allegro	300
*Angel in the Wings	238
*Antony and Cleopatra	255
*Brigadoon	427
*Command Decision	328
Cradle Will Rock (The)	229
*Crime and Punishment	233
*Finian's Rainbow	486
*For Love or Money	271
*Heiress (The)	335
*High Button Shoes	304
Inspector Calls (An)	291
John Loves Mary	465
*Man and Superman	308
*Medea	295
Mikado (The)	222
Music In My Heart	324
*Streetcar Named Desire (A)	249
*Winslow Boy (The)	283
*Young Man's Fancy (A)	383

1946 Vol.

*Annie Get Your Gun	382
*Born Yesterday	466
Burlesque	208
Call Me Mister	403
*Happy Birthday	280

1944 Vol.

*Harvey	95

1943 Vol.

*Oklahoma	341
Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of February 9, 1948*

1948 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1948

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
Cox and Box	378
Gondoliers (The)	371
H.M.S. Pinafore	378
Harvest of Years	394
Iolanthe	397
Kathleen	358
Last Dance (The)	367
*Look, Ma, I'm Dancin'!	364
*Make Mine Manhattan	382
Men We Marry (The)	379
Pirates of Penzance	399
*Power Without Glory	390
*Strange Bedfellows	386
Survivors (The)	374
Trial by Jury	399
Yeomen of the Guard (The)	361

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Kathleen"

"The Yeomen of the Guard"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of February 9, 1948*

Theatre Critics Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN — NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

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"Kathleen"

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 4, 1948

'Kathleen' Charming In Title Role Anyway

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A young actress named Andree Wallace, who plays the title role in "Kathleen," has a way of making the play disturbing and beautiful whenever she is on the stage.

Whether she is sliding feet first through a window or holding at bay a stuffy trio of guardians and a stuffier trio of suitors, Miss Wallace has a luminous vitality in her acting. She casts a romantic spell around herself and conveys that spell to the audience.

Rest Is Tedious.

When she is out of the picture the play drops to a sitting posture with a somewhat distasteful thud. It is transparent and mechanical. Based on a dubious situation, it stops at nothing for a laugh. The imaginative leading character would frequently be justified in mowing down her friends and relatives for the clumsy way in which they express their concern for her.

Kathleen is a youthful ball of fire around Dublin, and her professor father thinks his study would be more relaxed if she married a rich dolt. Not the girl to take suggestions, she dreams up a child she is having and a soldier who loves her.

The soldier turns up to flood the valley they live in with a dam, but turns her down on the basis of her claimed parenthood. The rich boy is forced to claim her by his father, who sees she will grow rich from the new power project. An ambitious opportunist agrees to marry her for a healthy dowry.

Uncle Sympathetic.

A priest flutters about, as empty of real consolation as he is of solution. Her father is irascible and irritating.

Only her uncle, a doctor, has patience and a sense of humor.

The author has described Kathleen as Ireland, guided by history, religion and science, and offered the choice of the rich or poor, both greedy, or the engineer with foresight, for her future. It is the engineer who wins her, though his greatest virtue in this case is that Kathleen loves him.

Roles Overdrawn.

Her fate is bandied about by this crew in a thoroughly disrespectful manner. The callousness of their treatment may be human enough under the circumstances, but their frank curiosity is embarrassing.

Believable characterization is tossed to the wind for the sake of slavish unpleasantries, until Kathleen has a tough time retaining a trace of unblushing self-respect.

The play is directed at a clip that gives it the air of one of those cut-rate comedies of other days. With some revision of tone it may yet yield a long-term income from stock rights.

'KATHLEEN.'

Comedy by Michael Sayers; directed by Coby Ruskin; setting by Charles Elson; costumes by Rose Bogdanoff; presented by Bea Lawrence at the Mansfield Theater Tuesday evening, February 3, 1948. The cast:

The Housekeeper ..... Anita Bolster
The Priest ..... Whitford Kane
The Poor Man's Son ..... James McCallion
The Doctor ..... Frank Merlin
The Father ..... Jack Sheehan
The Daughter ..... Andree Wallace
The Rich Man's Son ..... Henry Jones
The Soldier ..... Whitfield Connor
The Rich Boy's Father ..... Morton L. Stevens

Synopsis—Scene: The living-room-study Professor Fogarty's house not far from the City of Dublin. Time: Spring. Act I, Noon. Act II, A little later. Act III, Still later.

Capable Cast.

Surrounding Miss Wallace is an efficient cast that carries on with practiced motions. As her guardians Whitford Kane, Frank Merlin and Jack Sheehan are assured and capable of any demands put on them.

Henry Jones has some good broad comedy as the rich suitor, until the tricks get out of hand. Whitfield Connor is a likely looking army engineer, underplaying an equivocal role of doubtful sympathy. And James McCallion keeps the mechanic's fickle young eye on the main chance. Morton L. Stevens makes the most of an elderly plutocrat.

Daily Mirror

FEBRUARY 4, 1948

'Kathleen' Offered At Mansfield

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Things are picking up at the Mansfield Theatre. Conditions reached a new low with the recent arrival of "The Men We Marry." They improved a little last evening when "Kathleen" popped up. Maybe it won't be long now before the handsome house gets a good play for a tenant.

"Kathleen" is an Irish farce about a colleen, the daughter of a professor, who pretends she's going to have a baby. A greedy neighbor tries to marry his nitwit son to her for her fortune. And a brassy garage mechanic agrees to wed her for a hefty settlement.

Then in walks an upstanding, good-looking young Irish army engineer, whom Kathleen had met briefly at a party. He falls in love with her, but finds the forthcoming baby too much of an obstacle for his romantic inclinations. However, by the curtain's final fall, he has agreed to accept even a third party to win Kathleen.

Even before we get around to telling you, you've probably guessed that Kathleen was fibbing about that baby. She, daydreaming young romantic, had thought up that cute little touch to test the depth of her admirers' affections.

It's a short little farce, so author Michael Sayers had added a dash of social significance to pad it out into a full-length script. He has the young Army officer deliver a lecture on venality and the harm it has done Ireland for over 700 years.

Producer Bea Lawrence has equipped "Kathleen" with a cast of good players. It includes such capables as Whitford Kane, Frank Merlin, Andree Wallace, Henry Jones, Morton L. Stevens, James McCallion, Jack Sheehan, Anita Bolster and Whitfield Connor.

Miss Wallace, making her bow on Broadway in a featured role, acts the moonstruck Kathleen more attractively than she deserves. She's a pretty youngster and doubtless will be making screen tests shortly. Connor, a personable juvenile, also is likely to catch the eyes of film scouts.

Merlin, who has been actor, director and producer, proves he hasn't lost the histrionic touch as a philosophical doctor. Jones garners the biggest share of the applause and laughs with his impersonation of a dizzy, unhappy suitor.

"Kathleen" had a majority of the first nighters howling deliriously for much of the evening. Just what they were howling about was a mystery to us. But roar appreciatively they did. Perhaps the management was lucky to land an audience of premiereites that laughed easily at any old thing.

There have been other plays about mischievous and not very bright young women who pretended to be enciente, and, for us, they weren't funny either. We doubt that "Kathleen" will linger long on Broadway. We think today's playgoers are too smart to go for its anemic innuendoes.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 4, 1948

By HOWARD BARNES

Not Too Smooth Blarney

AN ODD attempt to dramatize the complexities of the Irish temperament has been made in "Kathleen." Michael Sayers, the author of the new play at the Mansfield Theater, has crowded a romantic farce with symbolism. What with brisk direction and several good performances, the work generates a bit of amusement. It is scarcely a key to modern and ancient Ireland. What significance may reside in a modern evocation of Kathleen ni Houlihan is either so obvious that it scarcely bears reiteration, or is quite obscured in a smoke screen of allegory.

• • •

The framework of the show is conventionally Celtic, right up to the breaking point of slapstick. The girl of the title lives with her father and two uncles in a village outside Dublin, dreams of love for love's sake alone and finally makes her dream come true by pretending that she is going to have a baby. This conceit leads to considerable prancing about the stage, as three swains claim the paternity of the imagined unborn child, some of it mildly funny. Sayers makes it clear, though, that he is equally intent on having his heroine personify Ireland, with history, science and religion for fathers and a rich boy, a poor boy and an engineer for suitors. The result is something of a muddle.

The Bea Lawrence production, under Coby Ruskin's direction, has jettisoned most of the author's musings about what makes an Irishman an Irishman. It has settled for what theatrical excitement there is in the script. Unfortunately there is not nearly enough to carry it through three acts. When Henry Jones is contributing a rich, broad portrayal of the rich man's son, or Frank Merlin is dominating the proceedings with his full-length portrait of a doctor, who tries to understand the day dreams of his niece, there is a nice quality to "Kathleen." It is not sustained.

• • •

Andree Wallace, new to Broadway, has been entrusted with the title role. She is very pretty and very Irish, but she plays with such aggressive spirit that her acting is more elocutionary than convincing. With experience and restraint she may become an addition to the ranks of young actresses. Jack Sheehan plays the bedeviled father violently and Whitford Kane is little more than so-so as the village priest. Playing at one and the same time the successful suitor and Eire's man of the future, Whitfield Connor gives an excellent account of himself. "Kathleen" has moments of amusement and meaning, but there are too few of them and they are ill-assorted.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 4, 1948

A Dismal New Comedy, Allegedly Irish

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

A few more plays like "Kathleen," which opened at the Mansfield Theatre last night, and the Irish are going to be very unpopular in this vicinity. The new comedy by Michael Sayers is a violently pseudo-Gaelic work, filled with many a "top of the morning," "Holy St. Patrick," "bad cess to you," "at all at all" and other sure signs of the fake Hibernian drama. By the grimmest kind of effort, the author restrained himself from a single "begorrah" or "be jabers," which reveals a remarkable self-control on his part.

Behind the feeble yet frantic "comedy" of "Kathleen" there is alleged to be some sort of political allegory, in which the heroine represents Ireland, and her suitors are Eire's unworthy sons. Since the play otherwise has something or other to do with an idiotically romantic girl who pretends that she is about to have an illegitimate child in order to test the men about her, I suspect it has enough sins on its soul without that of a mystic hidden message and will drop the whole matter forthwith.

Are They Irish?

There were those in the first-night audience who, aware of my interest in Ireland and its drama, kept asking me with considerable scorn if the Irish really talked and behaved the way they do in "Kathleen." Let me repeat for their benefit that the speech and the action in Mr. Sayers' play resemble those of Ireland just about as much as they do the conversation and conduct of recognizable human beings anywhere else, which is to say not at all. The men and women of "Kathleen" aren't even good theatrical stencils.

Several possible theories about why such a hopeless comedy was brought to town to face an interesting season's tough competition come to mind, all of them highly untenable. One is that the sponsors were the guileless victims of some one with a deep and bitter hatred for everything Irish. Another is that those responsible are interested in the success of the Dublin Gate Theatre, which is beginning a New York engagement next week, and want to make it seem particularly good by contrast. A more plausible contention is that June Lockhart is to blame for it all, this show's backers hoping that an unknown young actress named Andree Wallace would save "Kathleen" the way the lovely Miss Lockhart came to the rescue of "For Love or Money."

If that was the reasoning, it is wildly mistaken. A new player like Miss Lockhart doesn't arrive twice in one season. Miss Wallace is a pretty and pleasant girl and she works valiantly, but it would require some of the most magic acting known since the dawn of the drama to make "Katheen" engaging or its heroine anything more than an irritating nitwit. Certainly nobody can justifiably blame Miss Wallace. The author and the director cannot be let off so lightly. There is a lot of blame for them to share.

Things are in such dire shape that even so admirable an actor as Whitford Kane is lost in the role of an interfering priest. As a doltish and reluctant suitor, Henry Jones is pretty funny in a Tom Ewell sort of way, and Whitfield Connor achieves the feat of seeming less than silly as a dashing and romantic Irish soldier named Angus MacOgue. But these are merely minor details. The important thing is that "Kathleen" manages to bring both Ireland and the theatre into disrepute in one bogus effort.

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 4, 1948

'Kathleen' a Frantic but Feeble Little Play About—Yep—a Girl

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Kathleen" is a frantically Irish little comedy which is just as frantically a fugitive from the amateur-rights catalog of Samuel French & Co. It sought haven at the Mansfield Theatre last evening—but French will get it sooner or later, and I think sooner.

I guess it's Irish, at any rate. The characters are named Hanafey, Fogarty, MacGonigal and the like, and they say everything but begorra. And they call each other by their full names quite a lot—that is, a front name and a back name, like Kathleen Houlihan. If it were a Russian play they'd be calling themselves by a front name, a back name and a middle name, like John Gielgud's handle in "Crime and Punishment"—Rodon Romanitch Raskolnikoff. The middle name is how you can tell the difference.

Kathleen, in "Kathleen," is a romantic Dublin lass who tells her father, who is a professor, and her uncles, who are a priest and a doctor, that she is going to have a baby. There is an interlude of almost three acts and then Kathleen says the baby story is just a great big fib.

Beyond stating that there are comings and goings, there is little necessity of describing this interlude—except to say that one Henry Jones gives a very comical performance as a bashful suitor and that Andree Wallace looks nice in the title role.

Michael Sayers, who wrote "Kathleen," has been described as an author and critic. But not, I surmise, at the same time.

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 4, 1948

Spirit of Ireland

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Out of native love for Ireland, Michael Sayers has written an amateur allegory, "Kathleen," which had an amateur performance at the Mansfield last evening. Although she is Kathleen Fogarty in the play, she is Kathleen ni Houhlihan to Mr. Sayers, and everything she does is fraught with poetic significance. To an ordinary mooching playgoer, she is a wild, variable critter with a lying tongue and a gift for superfluous mischief, and the men who run screaming around her are like nothing so much as characters in a high-school farce.

Thanks to the professional foresight of "Kathleen's" press agent, it is possible to present the intellectual structure of the play in this pillar of information. "Kathleen is Ireland herself," says the press agent in all candor. "She has three fathers, representing history, religion and science, and she is claimed in marriage by three suitors—a rich man's son, a poor man's son and an engineer—symbolic of types of modern Ireland."

* * *

Amid the bedlam on the stage last evening, the symbolism escaped your unlicensed representative. That may have been partly because Coby Ruskin directed the performance with a horsewhip. It looked like "Strange Bedfellows" with a message. Kathleen is acted by a notably good-looking actress, Andrée Wallace, who couldn't have acted more briskly on a slack wire. The cast includes Frank Merlin and Whitford Kane, who are ruminative; Jack Sheehan, who spends the evening racing and wringing his hands; Henry Jones, who runs backward into the fireplace; James McCallion, who jumps through the window, and Whitfield Connor, who is more the serious type.

Under better circumstances they might stand in one place long enough to give an adult performance. But "Kathleen" opens the silly season, which generally comes later in the year.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 4, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Lot of Tumult; No Play.

A tiresome little Irish comedy called "Kathleen" rattled about the stage of the Mansfield last night, bringing forth some strenuous acting from a group of eager-to-please players, and it is all to no avail. "Kathleen," because of a previous booking, will have to find a new home after Saturday night. Its chances of getting shelter now appear to be very slim.

By all the rules of the drama, general consternation is brought to a stage when a young girl, unmarried, says suddenly that she is expecting a baby, and the commotion created by such an announcement in the new comedy by Michael Sayers is in accordance with the theater's traditions. Nobody actually jumped out into the orchestra last night but they did everything else.

It's the wilful and stormy little sprite named Kathleen—perhaps a distant relation of an Irish Peg of fond memory—who causes all the ruction. Two local suitors are involved but her dream man is an Irish lieutenant who kissed her at a Christmas party in Dublin. She loses him for a time or two during the three-act hullabaloo, but she's right there in his arms at the final curtain. Comedies like "Kathleen" end happily. Comedies like "Kathleen" belong in the Samuel French catalogue (amateur department) and not in the highly competitive Broadway theater.

Such likeable players as Whitford Kane, who appears as a kindly priest; Jack Sheehan, who is Kathleen's harassed father, and Frank Merlin, playing the philosophical doctor, go through the motions of play-acting upon the Mansfield's stage. They follow the lines of the script and the direction of Coby Ruskin.

Andree Wallace, who has the title role, is dark and pretty and is making her first New York appearance; she reveals something of a dramatic school technic and needs some more summer-stock work before going into her next Broadway play. Henry Jones, playing the fatuous son of the rich man of the community, gets some fun into his labors. He often suggests, in his expressions, that master comedian and deadpan wonder, Tom Ewell. James McCallion is all right as Christy and Whitfield Connor makes a nice appearance as Kathleen's soldier man. He is quite easy and straightforward. Charles Elson designed the play's setting and Rose Bogdanoff did the costumes.

"Kathleen" is a meager and clamorous comedy, and one not long for this life.

PM EXCLUSIVE

FEBRUARY 5, 1948

Kronenberger

Straight or Symbolic, It Seems Equally Bad

In *Kathleen* Mr. Sayers has written a very frantic farce about a girl, and has also aimed at a very symbolic fantasy about Ireland. Mr. Sayers is not the first person who, trying to do two things at once, has done them both very badly. As allegory, *Kathleen* is barely superior to those symbolic playlets that parents are compelled to sit through because their children have written them. As antics, *Kathleen* is just one more of those farces that critics are compelled to sit through because their children need shoes. And as acting, *Kathleen* does nothing to redress the balance.

* * *

Kathleen Fogarty, alias Kathleen ni Houhlihan, alias Ireland, is a high-mettled harum-scarum, intensely romantic about love. The wild unreasoning heart of her craves a man who will take her just as she is, without questions or conditions; and so she announces that she's about to have an illegitimate child. Of course it's not true; but as a test of faith, it doubtless has its points; while as a plot for farce, it most definitely has its precedents. As a plot for farce it also has its dangers; the chief one being that it may not seem funny. Barring a scant moment or two, it doesn't seem the least bit funny in *Kathleen*. All Mr. Sayers' efforts with Kathleen's symbolic and flabbergasted suitors, all his atempts to give the Emerald Isle the features of Diamond Lil, seem merely noisy and silly and a little tasteless and more than a little dull. Ireland, despite a plethora of brogue, hides her face; comedy, despite an abundance of clatter, hangs her head.

The staging is sort of feverish with people racing in and out of doorways and jumping in and out of windows. Andree Wallace, who plays Kathleen, is very pretty and very inexpert; but expertness is generally at a premium in *Kathleen*. Of even the best people in the cast, the most I can say—or rather steal—is you can tell that they've acted before.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

Journal American

FEBRUARY 4, 1948

Talky, Not Too Irish, Not Very Original

By ROBERT GARLAND

As a sort of builder-upper for the players from the Gate Theatre of Dublin, who take over at the Mansfield a week from yesterday, Bea Lawrence last night offered a "romantic Irish comedy" on the bespoken stage of the playhouse on 47th st.

Miss Lawrence's yes-and-no Irishmen are as brogueish as can be while performing Michael Sayer's "Kathleen." I doubt that the Dubliners will declare themselves as bravely when they arrive next Tuesday bearing "John Bull's Other Island."

These yes-and-no Irishmen, coming from Brooklyn, Ulster, New Hampshire, Cork, Philadelphia, Kanturk and Dennis-on-Cape-Cod, fail to get together when accenting Mr. Sayer's all-Irish characters.

In "Kathleen," every man is Irish, be he Priest, Poor Man's Son, Doctor, Soldier, Father, Daughter, Rich Man's Son or Rich Son's Father. In Professor Fogarty's Dublin study, they practice their accents on one another. . . .

Until the lady of the title comes on downstairs, emerging from the bedroom where she has been her father's prisoner.

• • •

A Delicate Question

Kathleen Fogarty's father has locked her in because she persists in day-dreaming about a handsome young soldier whose name, although she has neither seen nor heard of him, is Aengus MacOgue. He is also the man responsible for—

What Miss Fogarty has in mind is Violet Robinson of "Man and Superman" who finding herself in what used to be an interesting condition, refuses to name the father of her offspring.

As in the Bernard Shaw revival at the Alvin, each male member of the cast is looked down upon as a potential parent of the baby that should not be. Especially the Rich Man's Son, The Poor Man's Son and the handsome young lieutenant.

As for Mamma-to-be Kathleen, she complicates motherhood by the addition of metaphysics, a fantastic un-Shavian twist that need not be gone into here. The playwright is chary about going into it at the Mansfield. . . .

What is more, when Violet Robinson says she is going to become a mother, she is. But when Kathleen Fogarty says she is, she isn't.

• • •

Cast Tops Play

If you pay no strict attention to Bea Lawrence's production of "Kathleen," it is as if Violet Robinson has been transferred to Ireland and Tom Ewell, of "John Loves Mary," has come along for the ride.

For, as Seamus MacGonigal, the Rich Man's Son, Henry Jones brings Tom Ewell's Fred Taylor persistently to mind. He and the audience have fun. As Kathleen Fogarty, The Father's Daughter, Andree Wallace is a find.

Come to think of it, the cast is superior to the play. Whitford Kane as Father Keogh, Frank Merlin as Dr. Houhlihan, James McCallion as Christy Hanafey, and Whitfield Connor as Lieut. MacOgue, are right enough and Irish.

Taken as it comes—and goes, I shouldn't wonder—the temporary tenant of the Mansfield is good enough to be better than it is. If faults are to be stressed—and they are!—it is very talky, not very original and not as Irish as it pretends.

As a character in "Kathleen" remarks well toward the end, "It's better than an American picture." "My Wild Irish Rose?" for instance!

"The Yeomen of the Guard"

The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company of London is playing a limited repertory engagement. Except for their initial presentation space permits us to reproduce only four newspaper reviews of each presentation.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 3, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

'Yeomen of the Guard.'

The Monday evenings of this frequently surprising theatrical season have come to belong to the Century Theater, just as Monday afternoons of some years ago found many of us storming the Palace for the top acts in American vaudeville, so everybody reported as usual last night for the festivities of the D'Oyly Carte Company. The new bill, "The Yeomen of the Guard," is not one of the gayest of the Gilbert & Sullivan operas, but it is certainly one of the best.

"The Yeomen" is plotty and substantial. It reveals a Gilbert more or less grimly determined to get down to some real story-telling, and it offers one of the loveliest of the Sullivan scores. The new piece is well sung and it is played with affection and restraint.

Here in "The Yeomen," as the libretto takes on a serious note, is the tale of the marriage of a beautiful maiden, a strolling player, to the romantic Col. Fairfax, locked in the Tower of London and condemned to die within the hour. Everything turns out blissfully for the Colonel, who is saved by a ruse and finally by a pardon, but there is only desolation for the jester, the jocose Jack Point, who loved and lost. Martyn Green, an actor-singer and something of a one-man stock company, who is having a great season in upper Seventh avenue, plays the waggish but forlorn Jack Point with fine effect. He makes a real Shakespearean clown of the poor fellow, and his recitation of "I have a song to sing, O!" is one of the finest things done from the Century stage since all of this excitement began.

Richard Walker is glum and grotesque and comical as the fearful Shadbolt, head jailer, who longs to give up his grim calling and turn jester on his own account. Leonard Osborn is a dashing and manly Colonel and Helen Roberts is a melodious bride. Denise Findlay, the soubrette of this visiting troupe, is amusing and spirited as the Sergeant's coquettish daughter, and Richard Watson is an authoritative Lieutenant of the Tower. Ella Halman is impressive as the Tower Housekeeper. Some of the other D'Oyly Carte leaders are on the sidelines this week.

"The Yeomen of the Guard" has melody, humor and considerable pathos and it convinces me that Martyn Green should try some of the comedy roles out of Shakespeare if he ever finds himself with a free season. But that can hardly come about within the next half century.

Life goes along wonderfully with the D'Oyly Carte. Next week: "Patience."

'THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD.'

Opera composed by Arthur Sullivan; written by W. S. Gilbert; scenery and costumes by Peter Goffin; orchestra under the direction of Isidore Godfrey; staged by Anna Bethell; presented by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company of London at the Century Theater Monday evening, February 2, 1948. The cast:

Sir Richard Cholmondeley	Richard Watson
Colonel Fairfax	Leonard Osborn
Sergeant Meryll	Radley Flynn
Leonard Meryll	Thomas Hancock
Jack Point	Martyn Green
Wilfred Shadbolt	Richard Walker
First Yeoman	Rhys Thomas
Second Yeoman	Richard Dunn
First Citizen	C. William Morgan
Second Citizen	Peter Pratt
Elsie Maynard	Helen Roberts
Phoebe Meryll	Denise Findlay
Dame Carruthers	Ella Halman
Kate	Gwyneth Cullimore